

## INTERSECTION

### ACTS 8.26-40

In last week's sermon, we saw Philip, one of the leaders of the church at Jerusalem, join with those Christians who were dispersed from Jerusalem following the death of Stephen and the increased persecution of the church by the Jewish leadership.

Philip traveled to Samaria, possibly as far as 30 miles north of Jerusalem. There he preached the word where an uncertain but apparently a large number of people professed Christ as the Messiah – as Lord – and were baptized.

When word of the conversions reached Jerusalem, Peter and John traveled to Samaria to see what was happening. They were convinced of the conversion of the Samaritans when they prayed for them, laid their hands on them, and witnessed these Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit.

There was great joy in Samaria and I am sure there was great joy in the hearts of the Apostles and the church in Jerusalem when they learned the news.

Such a large number of converts would require teaching and discipling, so it would seem that Philip had his hands full dealing with this new church in Samaria. But God had other plans for Philip.

Here was Philip, caught up in the greatest revival ever witnessed outside of Jerusalem, and God called him to leave that place. The angel of the Lord directed Philip to travel down the road that led south out of Jerusalem to Gaza, a city located on the southern Mediterranean coastline of Palestine.

Why take Philip away from all of this action – this hotbed of conversion – to this desert place maybe as far as 50 miles away? Because there was another task that God had already set in place for him to do.

Meanwhile, while the revival was taking place in Samaria, there was a singular visitor in Jerusalem. This visitor was a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch, the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the

Secretary of the Treasury or the Minister of Finance of the Kandake of Ethiopia, the queen mother of Ethiopia who sat on the throne on behalf of her son who was the actual king.

We know very little about the man other than this. The Bible refers to him as a eunuch, which could have referred to his physical state, but could also be a simple reference to the status he carried in the kingdom of Ethiopia.

How he came to know about the God of Israel is uncertain, but it is known that in the dispersion of the Jews, many traveled to Egypt and south of Egypt into Ethiopia.

This eunuch had traveled hundreds of miles over dangerous and desert land to come to Jerusalem for the purpose of worshipping. We do not know how long he had been in Jerusalem, but much had happened in the last few days.

I wonder what the Ethiopian eunuch had witnessed in Jerusalem?

- Could it be that this man had seen or at least heard of Jesus and His crucifixion?
- Was he part of the dispersed nation of the Jews who had returned for the Passover and had witnessed the Passion week and the events of Pentecost?
- Could he have been one who heard the disciples speak in his own language?
- Could it be that he had seen the wonderful miracles of Peter and John and seen the remarkable growth of the church in Jerusalem?
- And what prompted him to ask to be baptized? Could it be that he had heard Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost? (*Repent and be baptized for the remission of sin.*)

Of course, these are things that we do not know from Scripture, but it was no accident that he was in Jerusalem at this particular time in history.

At this point in the story, the eunuch is on his way back to Ethiopia.

The route the eunuch was traveling was not the ordinary route to Gaza. Most people traveling south to Gaza from Jerusalem would first travel west to the coast and follow what was referred to as “The King’s Highway” – the primary trade route between Egypt and Damascus.

For some reason, the eunuch decided to travel a southerly route out of Jerusalem through Bethlehem and Hebron, possibly as far as Beersheba, and then west to Gaza – a much longer and less secure route than the highly-traveled northern route.

As far as the eunuch knew, he was simply on the road back home to Ethiopia. But God had other plans and He knew that the eunuch was actually on the road that leads to eternal life.

Such is the setting for our story and now we will see why God took Philip out of the midst of a successful and thriving ministry and directed him to this particular road in southern Palestine.

## I. God speaks to His people (v. 29)

For now, the eunuch was headed away from the center of the action. So **an angel of the Lord** called Philip to leave the ministry in Samaria and head down this road going south out of Jerusalem to seek after this one particular man.

He not only sent Philip to the exact location – God directed Philip to the exact chariot. (**v. 29**)

There is an important transition here in the way that God speaks to His people. In the OT, God used various methods of speaking to His messengers. Most of the time, He spoke to them directly.

In the NT, the Apostles knew Jesus – the Son of God, God in the flesh – personally and spent three years in ministry with Him.

Now, Jesus has taken His seat at the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit has come into the world, and from this point forward, this is the way that God will speak to His people, the church.

As the eunuch traveled along in his carriage or chariot, he read out loud from a scroll that contained the text of the book of Isaiah.

It was most likely written in Greek, the universal language of the day, so it was probably from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew writings.

Now the Spirit of God instructed Philip to go up to the chariot of the eunuch and “join himself” to the chariot – the meaning of the word is “glue yourself” to the chariot.

## II. God speaks through His people

It is very likely that Philip ran alongside the chariot at first until he realized that the man in the chariot wasn’t just talking to himself out loud – he was actually reading scripture that Philip recognized.

As Philip drew near the chariot, he heard the eunuch reading the text from Isaiah. The eunuch had to be reading very loudly to be heard over the noise of the harness and hooves of the horses and the sounds of the highway.

Apparently without so much as a “How do you do,” Philip asked if the man needed help in understanding what he was reading and volunteered to interpret the text if the eunuch was willing. Either Luke left out some of the story or God really had to be in this. Imagine your reaction if a man came running out of the desert and jumped up on the running board of your chariot!

Yet there did not seem to be any problem here. The eunuch knew that he needed someone to explain what he was reading and welcomed Philip into his chariot and asked him to please explain the text from Isaiah.

### **Romans 10.13-15**

God can save anyone He chooses just by saying the word, but for some strange reason, He chooses to work through people to reach other people. That is what evangelism is all about. It is not about you or I leading anyone to Christ. It is about us being so familiar with God and with His word that we can explain it whenever and wherever we are given the chance.

It is God who saves. We are simply His instruments.

### III. God saves by His word

Once again, we need to note that, with God, there are no coincidences. This man was not just reading from any text in Isaiah, but from a text which spoke directly of the Messiah.

The verses quoted in Acts are from *Isaiah 53.7-8*.

If he had been reading for some moments before Philip came along side the chariot, what had he already read?

#### **Acts 8.35 He preached unto him Jesus.**

The Bible doesn't say how far Philip went in the Scriptures with the eunuch, but he didn't have to go any further than this one chapter to get the point across concerning Jesus as Messiah.

52.13 – 53.2	Servant
53.3 – 4	Sorrowful
53.5-6	Substitute
53.7-9	Sacrifice/Suffered
53.10-11	Satisfied God
53.12	Savior

#### **Acts 8.36-38**

However the eunuch learned about baptism, he knew that it was the first step of obedience for those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ.

#### **Acts 8.39-40**

Philip was apparently translated out of the sight of the eunuch to a location over 30 miles away along the coast of the Mediterranean. Eventually, he traveled north up the coast where he settled down in Caesarea.

Later in the story, Paul and Luke stayed with Philip at his house in Caesarea where it is very likely that Luke learned this story.

The eunuch we never hear from again. Legend says that he carried the message of Christ back to his nation, but the Bible does not tell us so.

It does say that “...*he went on his way rejoicing*.” Earlier, he needed a human teacher to help him understand the word of God. Now, the Teacher lives in his heart in the form of the Holy Spirit.

### IV. God is sovereign in salvation

Man does not have it in his nature to seek after God. Because of the sin of Adam, all men are born with a totally depraved nature that prevents them from seeking after God or His salvation.

#### **Romans 3.10-12**

As we have learned in our *Experiencing God* study, it is God who initiates every relationship between God and man.

#### **John 6:44 (John 3.3; 5.24)**

God had a plan. There had been thousands of converts in Jerusalem following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and possible hundreds more in Samaria following the preaching of Philip.

But there was one single soul that God determined to bring into the kingdom. He intended for this Ethiopian eunuch to be saved.

God singled him out. He chose the man, the time, the place, and the method by which this man would come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

It is interesting to note that, unless the eunuch was traveling alone, which is not very likely considering his status in the kingdom, he was the only person that was affected by the witness of Philip.

Later we will see that the eunuch professes Christ, but there is no evidence that anyone else in the caravan responded to the message. God had singled this man out for salvation. Why?

Because He is God and He is sovereign in salvation.

Just as He brought this man to his appointment with salvation, God has brought you here today to hear His word and to confront you with the message of God's grace and salvation.

How will you respond to His call today?